Chapter IV

THE FLORIDA PENINSULA

The Florida peninsula forms a natural barrier separating the Gulf of Mexico from the Atlantic Ocean. Extending approximately 340 miles south of the Florida panhandle, the peninsula ranges in width from 100 to 140 miles. Except for a ridge that runs downits axis from the north, the peninsula is characterized by coastal marshlands and low elevations.[1] The 1,197-mile coastline of the state presents a cumbersome and often hazardous course for vessels traveling between the two major bodies of water. The notion of a direct water route crossing the peninsula originated as early as the sixteenth century and played a key role in the development of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway.

"THE FIRST SHALL BE LAST"

Advocates of political causes have never been reluctant to employ holy scripture when it serves their purpose. Henry H. Buckman of Jacksonville, Florida, president of the National Rivers and Harbors Congress, resorted to the Gospel according to St. Matthew in an impassioned address to the Intracoastal Canal Association in 1959: "...it is written," he said, "The first shall be last." His biblical reference alluded to the moribund cross-Florida barge canal project, "The first reach (of the national intracoastal waterway) to be conceived and seriously advocated" and “the last reach remaining to be constructed."[2] Indeed, the history of the long-desired cross-Florida canal recounts a succession of unsatisfactory studies, political controversies, heated opposition from various quarters, two abortive attempts at construction, and lack of funding.

The concept of a water route across Florida dates back to 1567, when Pedro Menendez de Aviles received instructions from his king, Philip II of Spain, to explore the peninsula and to determine a suitable route for crossing the isthmus. The route he recommended largely anticipated the one authorized by the United States Congress for a canal more than 300 years later. After Spain ceded Florida to England in 1763, British naval officers assigned to the territory reiteratd the desirability of a cross-peninsula waterway to the Lords of the Admiralty. Late in 1818, Army Engineer Captain James Gadsden wrote Secretary of War John C. Calhoun recommending investigation of a route from the St. Marys River on the Georgia-Florida border to the Suwannee River in Spanish Florida. (Eastern Florida had reverted to Spain in 1783.) U.S. acquisition of the territory in 1821 quickly generated more immediate interest in developing a route by which circumnavigation of the Florida peninsula could be avoided. At the end of 1824, Florida's legislative council urged Congress to consider constructing a canal from the Suwamee River to the St. Johns or any other appropriate eastern terminus. The three objectives cited in support of such a canal have been presented repeatedly to Congress

ever since: to develop the land, to benefit commerce, and to enhance troop and supply movements during wartime. Soon after the council's appeal, Richard Keith Call, Florida's first territorial delegate to Congress, wrote the chairman of the Committee on Roads and Canals regarding the advantages of an inland waterway between the Mississippi River and the Atlantic Ocean.[3]

Congress responded on March 3, 1826 by authorizing the first in a long series of surveys for a canal route across Florida. Chief of Engineers Major General Alexander Macomb instructed Brigadier General Simon Bernard to arrange for a survey brigade directed by an Army Topographical Engineer to examine the two routes specified in the act. Survey parties began their fieldwork in July, braving the summer sun and troublesome incidents with the Seminole Indians. Early in 1827, Bernard and his assistant, Captain William Tell Poussin, personally toured the routes, and they combined their findings with these of the various survey parties into the report submitted to Congress in 1829.

Although Bernard and Poussin observed that " both routes will require expensive excavations to supply the summit level with water ," they preferred the shorter and more southerly "St. Johns route, " utilizing the St. Johns, Santa Fe, and Suwanee rivers. The canal the y envisoned would rise more than 100 feet above the Atlantic but still require a cut of 60 feet beneath the summit of the mid-Florida divide. The Engineers also proposed extending this canal westward from the Suwanee River to St. Marks, from whence they believed an intracoastal waterway could feasibly be constructed. The total length of the trans-Florida canal would be 168 miles.[4]

A major problem identified by Bernard and Poussin was the questionable adequacy of the water supply along the ridge the canal would have to cross. To quell this uncertainty, Congress passed a second act on May 31, 1830, appropriating $10, 400 to complete the survey and estimate for the canal. A new survey team initiated studies of the infiltration properties of the terrain, but funds ran out before conclusive results could be obtained and Congress tabled the matter of the proposed canal.[5]

Congress rekindled the fire for the project with the Rivers and Harbors Act of August 30, 1852, providing $20,000 to complete the previous survey or to run a new line if necessary. Topographical Engineer Lieutenant Martin Luther Smith drew this assignment and directed his attention to a tours e between the headwaters of the St. Johns River and Tampa Bay. He concluded that at least two other routes across the peninsula might be preferable and recommended they be surveyed before any selection was made. For the third time, investigation of the proposed canal yielded inconclusive results.[6]

After the Civil War, navigation improvements commanded fresh attention from Congress, which once again focused on the Florida canal issue. The Rivers and Harbors Act of March 3, 1875 authorized a new

survey "to ascertain the most eligible line on which a canal across the Isthmus of Florida can be constructed ." This survey produced a recommendation for further study. An act dated June 18, 1878 provided for yet another survey, this time for a deep-draft "ship-canal" rather than a shallow-draft barge canal. Transit and level lines were run along a 170-mile route from the St. Marys River to St. Marks, including 60 miles across the summit. The Engineers concluded that the Okefenokee Swamp could meet demands for water to supply the canal and eleven locks would be needed to lift and lower ships using the waterway. They reviewed previous survey records, but for the fifth time in fifty years, the Army Engineers did not enthusiastically endorse the proposed canal project.[7]

Private enterprise entered the picture in 1878 when the Atlantic and Gulf Transit Canal Company was chartered with a $30 million capitalization to construct a canal across the state. This venture, however, came to naught. Several private surveys merely underscored the inordinate expense such a canal would entail. On June 14, 1880, canal proponents secured congressional authorization for a survey " to open steamboat communication" from the St. Johns River via Tohopekaliga Lake and Peace Creek to Charlotte Harbor. Once again, the Army Engineers rendered a " not practicable" verdict. [8]

Federal interest in a water route across Florida revived again under President Theodore Roosevelt. The survey conducted under the Rivers and Harbors Act of March 3, 1909 considered five routes for a barge canal but failed to generate a positive recommendation. The report of this survey, entitled "Intracoastal Waterway - Across Florida Section ," was published in 1913. Responding to a request from the Senate Committee on Commerce eight years later, the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors reviewed it and confirmed its negative findings in 1924. Two more surveys authorized in 1927 and 1930 also found economic justification for the canal lacking.[9]

Economic justification of a different type came indirectly, however, from the devastating financial conditions of the Great Depression in the early 1930s. Suddenly, the proposed canal offered new appeal as a salve for the pervasive problem of reemployment plaguing the country. In 1932, the mayor of Jacksonville and Henry H. Buckman went to New Orleans and joined with other Gulf Coast leaders to form the National Gulf-Atlantic Ship Canal Association, installing former Army Chief of Staff General Charles P. Summerall at its helm. Sensing that a century of discussion might now conclude with an actual canal project, the canal's major competitors began to organize opposition. Early in 1933, representatives of the Atlantic Coast Line . Railroad, the Florida East Coast Line Railway, the Seaboard Airline Railway, and the Southern Railway testified before the Special Board of Engineer Officers who were preparing a report on the surveys authorized in 1927 and 1930. These canal opponents introduced for the first time the possibility that the proposed project might endanger the underground water supply of central and south Florida.[10]

The members of the Special Board of Engineer Officers reported late in 1933 on the investigation of no less than twenty-eight routes, seven of which they studied in detail. Selecting a route through the St. Johns, Oklawaha, and Withlacoochee river valleys known as "13-B," they concluded either a barge or ship canal could be built. Presumably influenced by the testimony of the railroad interests, they advised that any canal design should incorporate locks to protect the Florida aquifer; however, in the end, their report stated that the proposed canal was not economically justified and should not be undertaken.

The findings of the special board were, of course, unpalatable to the growing corps of canal advocates who requested action be deferred until they could present new data to justify the project. Using his political clout, General Summerall persuaded President Franklin D. Roosevelt to form another board to reconsider the sensitive matter. In April, 1934, the President directed appointment of an Interdepartmental Board of Review which, in its report of June 28, recommended a 30-foot-deep sea-level ship canal. In August, 1935, sixty canal boosters went to Washington to press their cause to the President through Florida Senator Duncan Upshaw Fletcher.[12]

A natural disaster added to these political pressures probably turned the tide. On Labor Day, a hurricane struck the Florida Keys and grounded the Morgan liner S. S. Dixie on French Reef for almost two days.[13] With his shrewd sense of timing, President Roosevelt announced the next morning that he would allocate $5 million of relief money for the canal to 'forever make it unnecessary for seagoers to risk their lives in circumnavigating Florida's long, hurricane-blistered thumb.[w14] Two days later, work began on the sea-level project recommended by the Interdepartmental Board under provisions of the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935.[15] In this extraordinary manner, the long-unauthorized cross-Florida canal obtained its first funding.

Shocked by the sudden turn of events, canal opponents rallied, playing on the public anxieties over the underground water supply. Alarmed truck farmers and fruit growers formed the Central & South Florida Water Conservation Committee. The published advertisements asking, "What Will You Do Without Water?"[16] Disturbed by the growing opposition, Roosevelt announced on December 15 that he would not apply any more relief money to the carol but instead would ask Congress to fund it, thereby divesting himself of the responsibility for proceeding with the controversial project. Congress, however, chose not to appropriate funds for the project. In September, 1936, after $5.4 million had been expended and three percent of the project completed, operations were discontinued.[17]

Even the Army Engineers were unable to reach any consensus on the canal issue. The Chief of Engineers appointed a Revisory Board to review the various conflicting reports submitted to date. On November 1, 1936, the Revisory Board recommended the sea-level canal be completed to a 33-foot depth at an estimated additional cost of

$157,585,000. A month later, the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors held a public hearing after which its members determined a ship canal would shorten the route by "somewhat less than 1 day's steaming time, " preferred a lock canal instead in view of potential damage to underground water supplies , estimated its cost at $263,838,000, and concluded the canal was not economical y justified. In April, 1937, Chief of Engineers Major General Edward M. Markham disagreed, stating he considered a sea-level 33-by-4OO-foot ship canal worthy of favorable consideration based on the combined justification of unemployment relief and navigation improvement. Markam based his divergent recommendation on the timely notion that "employing those who would otherwise require relief" would, when labor expenditures were deducted from the capital investment in the canal, yield a "handsome profit in benefits to shipping."[18]

Congress took no further action on the canal issue until World War II, when German U-boats began sinking American vessels traveling along the coast. Early in 1942, Congress asked the Corps of Engineers to review the project in light of the military situation. By June, the Chief of Engineers and the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors agreed that the value of a 12-by-150-foot barge canal across Florida would "in time of war, together with the prospective benefits to be anticipated in normal times, " be " sufficient to warrant its construction. "[19] Route 13-B remained the preferred course, following the St. Johns River to Palatka, the valley of the Oklawaha River to the divide, and the Withlacoochee River to the Gulf. Locks along this route would protect the ground water supply. On July 23, 1942, the cross-Florida canal was authorized at long last in the interests of national defense as a high-level lock barge canal. This approval was included in the same act that authorized the enlargement and extension of the existing Gulf Intracoastal Waterway and the $93 million appropriation provided was applied to other features of the act, rather than to the cross-Florida canal project .[20]

Gradually, wit bout funding, the project fell into the "inactive" category. In 1958, the Army Engineers reported that an economic restudy yielded economic justification for the first time. Two years later, more hope for the cross-Florida canal appeared as presidential candidate John F. Kennedy came out in its favor. Appropriations finally began in 1962, plans were revised , and construction resumed on February 24, 1964.21

Still more problems lay in store for the controversial canal. As work across Florida continued through the 1960s, an urgent concern to preserve the environment swept across the country, giving long-standing canal opponents a restocked arsenal of ammunition and adding opposition from new quarters. The rail roads and the conservationists joined forces, claiming the 12-by-150-foot barge canal would drown a hardwood forest, threaten vegetation and wildlife dependent on an annual flooding cycle, and upset the hydrologic equilibrium. Further, they predicted the formation of "a series of stagnant, weed-clogged ponds" that would lead to use of herbicides and pesticides, in turn, polluting the aquifer. In 1969, the

Environmental Defense Fund, a legal action group, filed suit against the Corps of Engineers on behalf of a local organization, the Florida Defenders of the Environment. On January 15, 1971, U.S. District Judge Barrington Parker ruled the Corps had not complied with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and issued a preliminary injunction. Four days later, citing the advice of the Council on Environmental Quality, President Richard M. Nixon stopped the project .[22]

By canceling a congressionally authorized project to which $50 million in federal funds and $12 million in state funds had already been committed, the President's order “broke with precedent" and “violated political protocol. "[23] Nevertheless, new work on the canal halted abruptly on January 20, 1971, with about one-third of the 107 -roil e waterway completed. No further work has been undertaken since that time and prospects for the future of the cross-Florida canal seem dismal at this writing. Indeed, whether "The first shall be last” remains to be seen.

DRAINAGE AND NAVIGATION

Ironically, before shovels unearthed the first cubic yard of dirt for the controversy al cross-Florida barge canal excavation, developments in the southern part of the state actually led to the creation of an inland waterway between the Atlantic and the Gulf. The Okeechobee Waterway, however, came into existence more for purposes of drainage and land reclamation than for navigation .[24]

The Florida peninsula ranks as somewhat of a geological newcomer, having thrust its land mass above the sea a relatively short 19 million years ago. Sane time after that, huge covers of ice blanketed much of North America. Although these glaciers did not reach Florida, their great thaws washed melting ice water over much of the land, leaving an indelible mark on the geography of the peninsula. Okeechobee remained as a large, circular depression in the limestone, filled with fresh water. When rains filled the lake beyond capacity, they overflowed its low southern shores to nourish the unique, 50-mile-wide river of grass called the Everglades. This saw-grass marsh sweeps 100 miles southward in a dense, broad curve to the tip of the peninsula .25

The Indians named the lake "Okeechobee" which means "big water ." Indeed, the great lake contained more water than the Everglades alone could carry off, so the water seeped and spilled eastward to fill a swamp called Loxahat thee Slough and westward to form the headwaters of the Caloosahatchee River. When flood waters swelled within its hanks, the Caloosahatchee rose and overflowed the surrounding country to the north and to the south. In its natural state, this extreme southeastern appendage to the United States offered few enticements for human habitation; nevertheless, its history shows that , one way or another, man was determined to make it fit .[26]

Florida gained statehood in 1845. Over the next five years, its population grew from 57,951 to 87,455. In June, 1847, scholarly Buckingham Smith gathered information on the Everglades. His report, published by Congress in 1848, naively presented the feasibility of drainage. The year 1850 saw passage of the Swamp and Overflow Land Grant Act that provided for states to reclaim "swamplands" within their borders. Five years later, the Florida legislature empowered a Board of Internal Improvements to secure the federal grants and handle disposition of the swamplands. Proceeds from sales formed an Internal Improvement Fund to be applied exclusive y to land reclamation by use of levees and drains. At that time, however , the Everglades wilderness had attracted few settlers and the matter of drainage demanded less attention than continuing Indian problems and growing sectional strife within the country.

After the Civil War, the state's Internal Improvement Fund was heading into receivership, its money lest in interest guaranteed on prewar bonds for dilapidated railroads. Everglades property was being offered for thirty to forty cents per acre and no one was buying. During the 1870s, various s themes and scandals arose over the Everglades. Involved in one shady deal, Republican Lieutenant Governor William H. Gleason was ousted from office. He went on to petition the Internal Improvement Fund's Board of Trustees for swamplands that he intended to drain and he set up the Southern Inland Navigation & Improvement Company to claim free grants from the state. Gleason's accomplishments did not match his expectations , however, and nothing came of this scheme.

In 1878, unusually heavy rains fell throughout South Florida, inundating the Caloosahatchee valley for most of the year. Settlers, driven from their homes and tropical fruit placations on the rich hummock lands lining the river, asked the government to investigate drainage possibilities for the valley and the feasibility of lowering the water level in Lake Okeechobee. Assistant Army Engineer J. L. Meigs led a survey party up the Caloosahatchee River in March, 1879. Floating masses of water-lilies, wild lettuce, and "careless weeds" impeded the survey boat? s progress and the party reluctantly abandoned its attempt to enter Lake Okeechobee. Meigs recognized that the greatest advantage to be derived from draining the saw-grass marsh along the lake and the river would be reclamation of rich, black loam, particularly desirable for growing sugar cane. He concluded the sparse population along the river, largely engaged in raising cattle, did not provide commercial justification for improvement along the length of the river; he advised instead dredging between the mouth of the river and Fort Myers (population 150), indicating this "would satisfy all the needs of commerce for many years to come."[29] In 1882, Congess adopted his recommendation and authorized a project for a 14-mile-long channel from the Gulf to Fort Myers. This 7-foot-deep canal was completed by August , 1885.30

Still striving for drainage, state officials approached Hamilton Disston, a wealthy Philadelphian who was interested in Florida's undeveloped resources. Governor William D. Bloxham, president of the

Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund, persuaded Disston to purchase 4 million acres of swamplands for $1 million, thereby rescuing the insolvent fund from receivership. Disston and his friends formed the Atlantic and Gulf Coast Canal and Okeechobee Land Company to drain and improve this acreage west of Lake Okeechobee .[31] Disston's engineers went to work in 1882, starting at Fort Myers, dredging up the Caloosahatchee River to its headwaters, and cutting through the dense marsh to Lake Okeechobee. Although this improvement was not specifically designed to benefit navigation, it opened a 300-mile-long water route from the Gulf to the interior via Caloosahatchee River, Lake Okeechobee , and on up the Kissimmee River .[32] By 1887, the Army Engineers reported that steamers navigated the route at “irregular intervals" and regular trips were anticipated within the coming year.[33]

Disston's company dredged only the one canal. Even before 1882 had ended, an agent for the Internal Improvement Fund reported to the trustees in Tallahassee that Disston's two dredges would not be able to drain all the Everglades. In 1885, the trustees appointed a committee to study Disston's results. This committee produced the classic statement: "The reduction of the waters is simply a question of sufficient capacity in the canals which may be dug for their relief."[34] Future experience would show that the matter was by no means so simple.

Residents of the Caloosahatchee valley sought improvement of the upper reaches of the river by removal of snags and overhanging trees. Congress appropriated $4,000 for this purpose on August 5, 1886. By this time, however, sane local citizens had grown fearful that the increased volume of water in the river resulting from Disston's canal company operations threatened to overflow their lands and they urged the federal government to make no improvements that would increase this danger. In response, the Army Engineers modified the federal project for the upper river and completed the work in 1891. The threat from the Disston company when the financial depression of 1893 put a halt to further operations, and three years later Disston died.[35]

Meanwhile, another set of participants had joined the unfolding drama of the Everglades. Land value was approaching seventy cents an acre in 1879, when the state legislature decided to grant sections of swampland to railroad and canal companies along with the purchased rights-of -way. With Henry B. Plant and Henry M. Flagler leading the way, an era of intensive railroad building began. By the early 1900s, the rail roads controlled the Everglades, the Internal Improvement Fund had no money, and Everglades lands were not selling. Governor William S. Jennings sought a legal remedy to this situation, maintaining that the rail roads had received swamplands to which they were not entitled and the present trustees should not be bored by unfulfilled obligations assumed by former trustees. The trustees declared the previous issues of land to the railroads and canal companies invalid. On April 23, 1903, the United States government issued a patent to the Internal Improvement Fund trustees for more than two million acres of

Ever glades land. The rail roads promptly filed suit, but the Supreme Court five years later decided the superior title vested in the trustees.[36]

A local sheriff, and gunrunner in the Spanish-American War, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, succeeded Governor Jennings. In his dramatic campaign, Broward swore that all the Everglades could be drained at a cost of one dollar per acre. After his election* he requested that the state legislature create a Board of Drainage Commissioners. Consisting, as did the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund, of the state governor, comptroller, treasurer, attorney general, and commissioner of agriculture, this board was established on May 27, 1905. The commissioners were empowered to drain and reclaim swamplands, levy drainage taxes, and create drainage districts. In November, 1905, two new dredges constructed by the state went to work on the New River. The Everglades Drainage District was created on May 28, 1907, and empowered to levy taxes on the land around Lake Okeechobee. The following year, Governor Broward announced plans to build four more dredges. Everglades land value rose to five dollars an acre. Speculators jumped into the act, settlers flocked to the banks of the Caloosahatchee, land prices soared to a range of twenty to fifty dollars an acre, and soon 15,000 people inhabited an area where formerly there had been 12 landowners.[37]

The Everglades Drainage District based its operations on plans contained in a report known as the I sham Randolph Report, submitted by the Florida Everglades Engineering Commission to the drainage district board of trustees on October 25, 1913. Althuogh drainage was the name of the game, navigation received incident al benefits. Dredging of the St. Lucie Canal east from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie River quietly provided the final cut in a waterway crossing the Florida peninsula. By January 1, 1927, the district had constructed 486 miles of canals and levees plus fourteen concrete locks and dams. A levee skirted the southern, southwestern, and southeastern shores of Lake Okeechobee; four main drainage canals extended from the lake to the Atlantic Ocean and several auxiliary drainage canals had been dredged. Florida had spent more than $14 million, but drainage of the Ever glades continued to present a persistent and unsolved problem .3[8]

Two natural disasters demonstrated the inadequacy of these local protective measures. A hurricane on September 17-18, 1926, blew water across the southwestern rim of Lake Okeechobee, smashing the muck dikes built to keep Moore Haven dry. Several hundred people lost their lives. Another storm in the fall of 1928 lashed out even more savagely, inflicting more extensive property damage and killing approximately 2,000 persons. Whet her this unique swampland was meant for human use and habitation was no longer the point at issue. Everglades land was now valued at ninety-two dollars an acre. The struggling local interests sought help from the federal government to protect their considerable investment in the area .39

Navigation had long been a fringe benefit of the drainage efforts in southern Florida. In 1888, Army Engineers recognized that the inhabitants of the Caloosahatchee River valley were "entirely dependent on the river for the carriage of all heavy freights and bulky products."[40] Citrus growers, sugarcane farmers, and cattlemen had used the river for years. Thus, when federal aid for the Caloosahatchee valley and Lake Okeechobee area finally came, Congress attempted to achieve a combination of flood control and navigation objectives. Under provisions of the Rivers and Harbors Act of July 3, 1930, a shallow-draft channel dredged along the southern shore of Lake Okeechobee furnished material used to build a 31-foot-high levee; the levee was designed to provide the long-sought protection for the flood-prone areas around the lake's southern borders. Project modification under the Rivers and Harbors Act of August 30, 1935 called for the United States to maintain the completed works and to bear the cost of drainage structures except for $500,000 to be raised locally. By 1937, a navigable channel with minimum dimensions of 6 by 80 feet connected the Gulf with the Atlantic Ocean.[41] A beneficiary of the demand for relief from flooding, the Okeechobee Waterway constituted a potential link in the growing system of inland waterways.

THE FLORIDA GULF COAST

The next part of Florida logically begging for intracoastal waterway development ran along the western coast of the peninsula. By the middle of the 1930s, with the Atlantic Inland Waterway completed and the connecting Okeechobee Waterway nearing completion, operators of commercial barges, pleasure and excursion boats, and fishing vessels sought a suitable western exit from which they could continue protected passage northward. With a population of more than 300,000, the coastal area seeking the waterway improvements included the cities of Tampa, St. Petersburg, Sarasota, Fort Myers, Clearwater, Bradenton, and Tarpon Springs. Catering to a large tourist trade, this region produced citrus fruit, vegetables, livestock, lumber, fish, lime, and phosphate rock. Local interests requested the improvement of an inner waterway “as a link in the Intracoastal Waterway from Boston to Corpus Christi." Although some scattered improvements had been accomplished earlier, no comprehensive project existed for Florida's Gulf coast. In 1935, Congress authorized the first preliminary examination and survey for an intracoastal waterway from the Caloosahatchee River north to the Withlacoochee River.

Geographical features tended to divide the Gulf coastline of the peninsula into two naturally distinct sections. Directly north of the Caloosahatchee River, a chain of inlets or passes between the barrier islands and the coastline composed an almost continuous "inside" waterway, extending 148 miles north to the Anclote River. Above the Anclote River, the shoreline lay directly exposed to the action of the Gulf; however, because the water deepened very gradually along this reach and waves dissipated far offshore, small vessels could navigate safely in the open waters under normal weather conditions. In stormy weather, entrances at the mouths of the Homosassa, Crystal, and Withlacoochee rivers afforded refuge.[43]

The first federal project for intracoastal navigation along Florida's Gulf coast consisted of dredging a 5-by-100-foot channel in Sarasota Bay, to run south from Tampa Bay to Sarasota. In 1890, when Congress appropriated $5,000 for this purpose, channel limitations restricted exportation of the region's rich abundance of agricultural products. Below Sarasota, farmers required only a 3-foot-deep channel to carry their goods to Little Sarasota Pass or to Sarasota, where they could connect with the Tampa Bay steamers. A modification of the Sarasota Bay project in 1896 extended the improvement south to Caseys Pass with a 3-by-75-foot channel. In 1907, this project was extended further to Venice. By 1917, two-thirds of the 3,841 tons (brick, canned goods, groceries, cement, corn, feed, fertilizer, fish, flour, grain and hay, ice, lumber, refined oils, shingles, and miscellaneous merchandise) transported on this waterway moved between Sarasota and Tampa. Two years later Congress provided for a relocated 7-foot-deep channel above Sarasota.[14]

Northward along the coast, Boca Ciega Bay, the Narrows, and Clearwater Harbor formed the basis for an inland waterway from Tampa Bay to the Anclote River. In 1910, Congress adopted a project to improve this stretch with a 7-by-100-foot channel from Tampa Bay into Boca Ciega Bay and a 5-by-50-foot channel on to Clearwater Harbor. Legislation in 1919 provided for channel dimensions of 8 by 100 feet from Boca Ciega Bay to Tampa Bay. Army Engineers completed this channel enlargement in 1920.[4]5

In 1939, the Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors recommended an intracoastal project, 9 feet deep and 100 feet wide, reaching from the Caloosahatchee River north to the Anclote River. The Board saw the proposed waterway as a connecting link in the Boston-to-Corpus Christi intracoastal system and argued that it would facilitate economical collection and distribution of freight for the deep-water harbors on the western coast of Florida. As proposed, the Calootsahatchee-to-Anclote waterway would incorporate the improvements already made in Sarasota Bay, Caseys Pass, and the channel from Clearwater Harbor to Tampa Bay. For the 45 miles from the Anclote River to the Withlacoochee River, the only recommendation for improvement consisted of marking a route along the 12-foot depth in the Gulf and constructing and maintaining suitable harbors of refuge. The South Atlantic Division Engineer, Colonel Jarvis J. Bain, estimated the potential commerce of the waterway would be at least 202,000 tons annually.[46]

World War II delayed funding for Florida's intracoastal waterway until 1945, and its authorization then included the usual provision that local interests furnish all lands needed for the project. Accordingly, in 1947, the Florida legislature created the West Coast Inland Navigation District, empowered to levy taxes for land procurement. During the interim, however, a number of fine homes and apartment houses had been built on or near the originally authorized route through Venice, raising land values considerable. Moreover, local interests objected that the original route would cut off the rapidly growing population of Venice from the Gulf and its beaches.

The desirability of adopting an alternate route and revising the cost-sharing arrangement between the federal government and local interests generated modifying legislation in 1948, 1950, 1954, and 1957. Terms of local compliance were resolved in 1959 and dredging began in June, 1960. The final segment dredged in the 151-mile waterway was the alternate route known as C-1. Completed in January, 1967, this 5-mile alternate passageway cut inland, encircled most of the city of Venice, and then rejoined the original route north of Lemon Bay.[47]

Project modification in 1962 incorporated maintenance of the Sunshine Skyway Channel that had been created from a borrow pit for bridge fill and ran parallel to the bridge, across the entrance to Tampa Harbor. The following year, another modification provided for construction of a channel for small craft, 6 by 80 feet, in Boca Ciega Bay. Called Cats Point Channel, this smaller channel was designed primarily to serve recreational vessels, affording a shorter route to the harbor of refuge at St. Petersburg. Within two years after its completion, the Florida intracoastal waterway carried 418,268 tons--more than twice the tonnage estimated when the Army Engineers first recommended the project. Commerce has risen steadily since then, totaling 1,568,618 tons in the year 1978. As may as 152,986 passengers have traveled on this waterway in a single year.[48]

With completion of the main channel of the Florida intracoastal waterway in 1967, the only stretch on the Gulf Coast not incorporated into the existing 25,000-mile network of inland waterways lay between the Anclote River and St. Marks. In 1968, Congress authorized a waterway 12 feet deep and 150 feet wide to extend from St. Marks to Tampa Bay, overlapping the upper 43 miles of the Florida intracoastal waterway. Shortly after passage of this legislation, however, growing concern over environmental preservation cast a new light on the impact of many waterway projects. As a result, construction of the cross-Florida barge canal ceased in 1971 and the GIWW segment between Carrabelle and St. Marks, authorized in 1937, has still not been constructed. Work on the final connecting link, south of St. Marks, never began. Disposal of excavated material along the shoreline posed major environmental problems, giving Floridians cause to reconsider their local sponsorship. Lack of progress on the Carrabelle-to-St. Marks channel, directly to the north, and discontinuation of the cross-Florida barge canal further detracted from the proposed channel. In the end, the state decided not to sponsor it. Vessels continue to ply the open waters of the Gulf south of St. Marks and the project between St. Marks and Tampa Bay remains authorized but not funded.[49]

Unlike other portions of the inland waterway system intended to connect far-distant points, the Florida intracoastal waterway functions mainly for short hauls. Along this route, barges carry commodities to the nearest seaport, where they can be transferred to ocean-going vessels.[50] Recreational use of the channel is heavy and commerce continues to increase. Meanwhile, the fate of the continuous waterway as originally conceived awaits resolution.